4t Wilson G-3 (no date) 1937 MH1 Iraq MH1
Iraq Bedouin MH1
Kurd MH1

B 619 558 178 461 a severe slump in the camel market. Slowly and very reluctantly the bedouin are turning to cultivation and feel themselves immeasurably lowered in the process. Strangely enough, they are also to be found in greasy overalls, working on the rigs of the Mosul Oil Companies. In this work they do not lose caste as they do if they become cultivators.

B 6aa Shaikh Ajil al Yawar is the paramount Shaikh of the 'Iraqi Shammar. He is an outstanding personality possessing a fine presence and a wonderful charm of manner. With singular astuteness he has managed to control his tribesmen, keep on the right side of successive governments and at the same time amass a considerable fortune for himself. During recent years his figure has perhaps suffered somewhat from the use of motor-cars instead of riding a fiery Arab steed or liver-shaking "dhillool" (trotting camel).

Turkomans

I 173 162 Leaving the Arabs, we come to the Turkomans. They are the remnants of ancient immigration and are to be found in Tel Affar town between Mosul and Sinjar and in a string of villages across to Altun Keupri and Kirkuk. Arbil is also largely a Turkoman town. The village of Nainawa, the ancient Nineveh, just across the Tigris from Mosul, is Turkoman. In a mosque built on unexcavated Assyrian remains it contains the reputed tomb of the prophet Jonah. The mosque is also said to contain a portion of the vertebræ of the whale!

I 162

Kurds

K 101 144 619 Next we come to the Kurds, who form by far the majority of the population of the mountain areas and who are also to be found in a large number of villages well south of the mountains. The Kurds are Aryan in origin and Sunni Muslims by religion. The mountain Kurds and in fact all the mountaineers of Kurdistan bear a close resemblance to the Scottish clans of two hundred years ago. They are still organ-

K 6a2 657 644 276 619 ooo ized on a tribal or clan basis, though the increase in government control and influence is naturally tending to destroy this organization and undermine the power of the chiefs, or Aghas as they are called. Aghas may, however, still be seen proceeding to town or market with a "tail" of armed henchmen and even a pipebearer. The Kurdish pipebearer is, however, concerned with the Agha's tobacco pipe and not with music. Kurdish music is nevertheless played on a pipe

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I K 438 439 173 782 539

now a flourishing market for the surrounding country and for trade with Turkey. It has one feature of great interest: an ancient bridge of Roman design, known locally as "Alexander's bridge," though unlikely to be in any way connected with the great conqueror. Tradition at Zakho has, however, another tale of the construction of the bridge. It is said to have been built by a celebrated local governor, who found that the keystone would not remain in place. He summoned a soothsayer, who proclaimed that it would never stand until a life had been built into the arch. The governor accepted the verdict and with his councillors, who were sworn to secrecy, decided that the first living thing to follow them on to the bridge the next morning would provide the necessary victim. They waited for some hours, but no one came. Then the governor's little daughter wondered why her father was so long away and taking her pet dog she set off to look for him. Her father was at first terrified when he saw her coming, but was relieved when he noticed that her dog was running in front of her. Alas, she thought it unfitting for the dog to approach her father before she did and so she called it and stepped on to the bridge. Public opinion compelled the governor to carry out the sacrifice and the girl was built into the centre of the arch and the keystone held and has gone on holding for hundreds of years.

I K 653 185

The development of Kurdistan has naturally not been popular with all the Kurds, and I remember an interesting incident. During the construction of the Amadia road, an elderly Agha stood for a while sadly watching the blasting of a pulpit of overhanging rock. When echoes of the explosion had died and the last fragments of stone had fallen into the rocky gorge below, he turned sorrowfully away. "The old days, the old days," he lamented. "Many is the time I lay behind that rock with my rifle and held up caravans for safe-conduct money."

I K 721 361

The town of Amadia, which, like Edinburgh Castle, is situated on a rocky plateau at a height of 4,100 feet, sixteen feet higher than Cairn Gorm, is now easily accessible by road. The town was formerly ruled by semi-independent Pashas who admitted a nominal suzerainty to the Turkish authorities. It has a stormy history, and the minaret of the mosque is pitted with bullet holes. These are souvenirs of 1925, when the Barzan Kurds, in alliance with some of the descendants of the old rulers of Amadia, attacked the town and succeeded in surrounding the Mosuli qaimaqam and a handful of police in the Government serai. The stout-hearted garrison held out until they were rescued by a body of Assyrians under the Assyrian bishop, Mar Semis, a jovial Friar Tuck of the Nesterian Church.

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would know the difference.' They went on to point out large numbers of sheep dotted around the horizon and they explained that had there been a large number of camels with a few sheep, then bedouin would have been indicated. Instead there was a large number of sheep with a few camels, indicating Arabs. They had to go on to explain that by Arabs they meant the great landowning Shia tribes, who are in the main cultivators of rice, dates, barley and a variety of other crops, but they send out their sheep on long treks through the desert in charge of some of their families in search of grass.

Most of the Arab tribes are dwellers in houses or clean, cool huts made of reed matting, which allows for a constant current of air through the hut, and prevents the temperature from rising to that of an oven in the hot sun, like a house. Many of these stories were told in a large guest house or tent pitched amongst the houses, with a background of sound varying from that of the cooking of a meal of several roast sheep to the powerful thump, thump, thump, of the great pumps. These pumps deserve mention, since they are often a tribe's principal pride and source of wealth. At one place I was surprised to hear that a boy's name was Rustam, since this name is more common amongst Persians and Kurds than amongst Arabs, but it was explained to me that he was named after the pump, and I understood when I saw the name Rustom stamped on an iron plate on the great cylinder.

The Arab tribes have a great military history of which they are justly proud. It is long and somewhat complicated, and to give in full the history of a single tribe as told by the sheikhs would fill a book greater in size than this. I will, however, give a précis of the history of that great group of tribes which were known as the Muntafiq.

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173 The Muntafiq was a confederation of the Shia tribes living around the Gharraf River and around what is now the town of Nasiriya, drawn together for the purpose of opposing the Turks by Saadun of the Sunni family of Es Shabib, who became the founder of the house of Saadun. The tribes of the Muntafiq used to raid the Turks in the Basra area and harry their convoys on the road to Baghdad. However, in 1775 a new threat developed in South Iraq in the form of a Persian advance on Basra, and the Saadun leaders of the Muntafiq apparently decided that the Turks were the lesser evil, for they sent a force of their cavalry to assist them and stationed it at the ancient village of Zobeir.

Throughout the siege of the city the Muntafiq cavalry remained at Zobeir, which is about ten miles from Basra and separated from it by a salt plain liable to flood. The tribal horse, under Sheikh Abdulla es Saadun and Sheikh Thamir es Saadun, could not have been of much assistance to the garrison of the city, for the fighting was taking place in the belt of palm trees interspersed by numerous creeks which surrounds the town on all but one side; and the Persian infantry were assisted by that redoubtable tribe of watermen, the Kaab, who were particularly valuable in the area of marsh which used to extend from what in the last war was the military camp area of Makina to what is now the modern port of Maqil. It appears to have been a major error that the Muntafiq did not bring their footmen and boats down to assist in the defence of Basra, for the country was quite unsuited to cavalry; but it must be remembered that the Muntafiq could only have been lukewarm allies of the Turks, whom they had been fighting so recently.

Basra surrendered to the Persians in the spring of 1776,

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after a defence in which the Turkish garrison did not distinguish themselves. The Muntafiq force, however, remained at Zobeir, from where they controlled all exits from Basra to the desert, and the Euphrates route to Baghdad. It soon became apparent to Ali Muhammed, the Persian commander, that a port without a hinterland is a doubtful acquisition, but he took no measures against the Muntafiq tribesmen until 1778, when sheer boredom and the necessity of tending to their crops had reduced the Muntafiq force at Zobeir to practically nothing. Then, after a surprise attack, the village fell easily to the Persians, and Ali Muhammed ordered the Muntafiq garrison to be put to the sword.

The fury of the great tribes of the Muntafiq knew no bounds when they heard the news of the loss of Zobeir, involving as it did the rape and death of some Muntafiq women. Hawasing, or the singing of war songs accomanied by war dances, inaugurated a general rising of the whole Muntafiq confederation, the much dreaded 'Hamrat el Muntafiq'. Sheikh Thamir es Saadun took command of the Muntafiq forces, and a large horsed contingent marched down on Basra over the desert, while the tribal boats came down over the Hammar lake, and the footmen marched down the banks of the Euphrates River and the lake itself. Some ten thousand Persians marched out of Basra under Ali Muhammed to do battle, and the Persians also put on the river a flotilla of some twenty Basra jalbuts on which they had mounted guns and which had crews impressed from Basra itself. The redoubtable Kaab were absent from their order of battle.

The Persians seem to have learnt many false lessons in their campaign against Basra, and the most fatal of these was their belief that the Muntafiq tribes were desert

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• 173 fighters unable to manoeuvre in the palm belts and marshes. Thus, when their advanced guard cavalry gained contact with the Muntafiq horse in the desert Ali Muhammed successfully manoeuvred his force to drive them into the marshes and into what appeared to be a trap, an area surrounded on all but the entrance side by marsh or by bends of the river. The main Persian force entered this area to complete the destruction of the trapped tribesmen, but soon realised that the marshes were swarming with Muntafiq footmen. While the river held only tribal boats, there was no sign of the Persian flotilla, which, some say, had already been destroyed. When they attempted to retreat from this death-trap, the Persians found their escape blocked by more mounted tribesmen from the desert. Thamir es Saadun is said to have raised his sword and ordered a general massacre of the Persian force, a departure from the tribes' usual custom of taking prisoners, in revenge for the atrocities at Zobeir. Ali Muhammed was amongst the slain, and it is said that only three men escaped alive.

As a direct result of this disaster, in which they lost a major part of their force, the Persians evacuated Basra in the following year. This victory over the Persians was the Muntafiq's greatest success, but it also contained the seeds of the final dissolution of the Confederation, since the Shia tribes had been drawn together under Sunni leadership for the common purpose of opposing the Turks. After this battle the policy of the paramount sheikhs, the Saaduns, became more and more pro-Turkish, and by the middle of the nineteenth century we find that the paramount sheikh had almost invariably the title of Pasha, and was supported by the Turks in his rule of the Muntafiq. The tribal army now underwent a change: the great

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Shia tribes sent less and less of their men to rally to the Muntafiq standard, and the tribal cavalry consisted of paid retainers of the ruling house. There were, it is true, occasional differences between the Saaduns and the Turks, as when the powerful Saadun Pasha was at loggerheads with the Wali of Basra.

The Confederation is a thing of the past, and its Shia tribesmen now owe loyalty only to their own tribal sheikhs, and above them to the Government of Iraq. It is touching to find in some remote reed hut carefully tended pictures of King Feisal and of His Royal Highness the Regent. The tribes had their greatest glory in the days when the country was under foreign domination, when they were the rallying-points of the resistance which prevented the absorption of Iraq into either Turkey or Persia. In a democratic state the position of the tribes is less clear. There is much that is fine in tribal life and worth preserving at all costs, and a tribal loyalty need not necessarily interfere with modern progress. For example, numbers of tribesmen from all over Iraq now live in the capital, working in various jobs, as artisans and labourers, lawyers, doctors and engineers. In this growing State a boy may be born in a tribal reed hut, and if intelligent finish up as a doctor in Baghdad. All these emigrants from the tribes maintain close contact with their tribes, usually by way of entertaining tribesmen on their visits to the city. When a sheikh makes a levy, for some purpose, of a dirhem from the head of every family in his tribe, the emigrants are the first to send in their money: though they may be wealthy doctors driving American saloon cars, they send in the exact dirhem along with the labourers and artisans. To send more would savour of ostentation.

Life in the tribes is changing year by year. The pumping